

1 PART 2

2 -- special nutrition program which includes commodities, WIC
3 and school meals program. And we did have a proposal for the
4 first time in twenty years for an administration to present --
5 because the food stamp program is so complicated and is our
6 largest program, we started this conversation with food stamps
7 first, but we can be the listening sessions around country on
8 the special nutritions programs. We will be hearing
9 conversations, and while you may recognize that most of you are
10 here today, some of you are here with some interest in the
11 other programs. Interestingly enough for the programs, all of
12 these programs are going to be reauthorized at the same time,
13 and it's going to be a difficult promise for the agency. So we
14 wanted to get started early.

15 MS. WATKINS: There's a question out here in the
16 audience. Do you mind if she asks it from there?

17 MS. JUDITH ROSEN: What do you think the deadline
18 date for getting comments in is?

19 MS. WATKINS: August 31st. So if you can get your
20 comments in by the end of August -- probably we'll take them
21 after that because we're going to be trying to get as much
22 information as we can. It's important that we hear from people
23 around this country who are interested in this program. It's
24 not something that you go to a desk in Washington. We're not
25 about to do that. This is very, very important to hear from

1 all of the people who are interested in improving this program.

2 Okay.

3 MS. ROBIN JACKSON: Good afternoon. Thank you
4 very much for the opportunity. E-mail is how I found out about
5 this today, and I was able to take a few hours off from work.
6 My main concern is the elderly that are living on seven
7 hundred dollars' income. If they apply for food stamps, they
8 usually won't get more than ten dollars a month. And in this
9 day and age you hear it, and you've heard it in everything
10 that's going on right now at these political conventions that
11 they're talking about paying for prescriptions. People are
12 choosing between food and prescriptions. If people do not have
13 family to help them pay for their prescriptions, they are not
14 able to buy their prescriptions or they have to suffer by not
15 purchasing food to go along with taking these prescriptions for
16 their health. So it's something in this land of plenty that we
17 don't have enough to help our elderly. We should be thoroughly
18 ashamed of ourselves.

19 If you could have people sit with them and talk to
20 them and listen to their dilemmas and they could be widows or
21 widowers but they have no other support than Social Security,
22 and if they did not have a job that reaped benefits of any
23 kind, they have no money for food. So that was my primary
24 concern, and I'm not going to speak long, but as I was sitting
25 here listening to everyone, they're talking about this car.

1 They can't get food stamps because the limit of the resource of
2 the car. Why not exclude one car? We do it for children's
3 Medicaid. I think we do it for the elderly. Why not do it for
4 food stamps? Someone who's lost a job needs a car. We're only
5 giving three months of food stamps now, I think. Why not
6 exclude one car no matter what the value? Don't penalize
7 someone who's bought a '98 or a '99 car and say I'm sorry you
8 lost your job, but you've got a car, you can't get benefits.
9 That's number one.

10 Number two, the striving in this state for QC
11 perfection is an abomination. Enhanced funding is the only
12 concern of the Department of Human Services for the State of
13 Texas. And if they have perfect cases, and have had it, I
14 believe, a few years in a row, they get millions of dollars
15 from the federal government. Never mind losing caseworkers
16 because they can't keep up the loads. Never mind being
17 understaffed. Never mind any of this. We have to have
18 enhanced funding and something has got to be done to increase
19 the staff -- start to cover half of it. If you saw the entry
20 level and the qualifications necessary, they give raises to
21 them maybe once every four years. There is no money for
22 training. There is no money for retraining. There's no
23 raises. When they give merit raises, if you haven't had one
24 for a year and you're -- you might get one, but if they start
25 getting merit raises then what happens next is you can't have

1 it because there's a limit within a year's period of time of
 2 getting the raise. They're losing staff. They spend thirty
 3 thousand dollars to train a person. If you saw the turnover
 4 and the amount of money paid in training food stamps staff, it
 5 is very, very sad. Another situation is a suggestion as far as
 6 the elderly is concerned. We have senior citizens all across
 7 the country. People come there for a meal for a dollar. Why
 8 not have a roving food stamp unit go out to the senior centers
 9 and see what they can do about getting seniors into the
 10 program? They go to rehabilitation centers, or they used to
 11 years ago, and the food stamp system has got something about
 12 the budget because an elderly person that's on seven hundred
 13 dollars a month that gets ten dollars is not fair. So the
 14 deductions that are allowed are not reasonable in today's
 15 lifestyle. Thank you very, very much for the opportunity.

16 MS. WATKINS: Thank you. We have another caller.
 17 This is an elderly mother. Her mother gets a disability check
 18 and turned down a ten-dollar amount they offered her. Why is
 19 she going through that? It takes about a hundred dollars each
 20 month for her groceries. So at least fifty dollars would make
 21 a real difference and keep her mother healthy.

22 Okay. Let me thank all of you again for your
 23 comments. Unless someone else would like to comment, we don't
 24 have anyone else who has registered that they would like to
 25 make comments at this time. Is there anyone else?

1 DR. NETTIE FISHER: The one concern I have is the
2 nutrition education program. USDA is requiring us to provide
3 outcome measures. At best, the outcome of nutrition education
4 has to be done with longitudinal studies, not yearly studies,
5 and a lot of people are almost fearful to participate because
6 of not being able to provide the kind of statistics that will
7 show outcome results. And there is no way that you can
8 actually show outcome other than number of participants
9 contacted or touched by your education rather than whether or
10 not it made any difference.

11 MS. WATKINS: Okay. Thank you very much. If
12 there are no other comments, let me thank you again for your
13 attendance here today, and your participation will just be
14 invaluable as we move through this process of looking at
15 standards and looking for new and creative ways to make this
16 program the best that it can be for families in this country.
17 I'd also like to thank again our regional office staff who did
18 an outstanding job in helping to make certain that this program
19 was effective and that people have been contacted for their
20 participation. Thank you again, and have a wonderful
21 afternoon. Oh, there's a caller on the line. This is Shirley
22 Watkins with the USDA Food Stamp Conversation. Go ahead
23 caller.

24 MS. EMELDA MARTINEZ: Hi, I'm calling on behalf of
25 my mom. My mother has applied for food stamps, and what I was

1 told is that she was informed that she could only qualify for
2 thirty-four dollars a month. Now, with that money, which would
3 be helpful, however, her prescriptions are very high. So many
4 times she can't afford -- I don't think that she can afford to
5 pay for her prescriptions as well as to pay for her groceries.
6 And I think it's a toss-up as to whether or not she eats or
7 takes her prescriptions. And the family has been pitching in
8 on the prescriptions, but I was wondering what can be done in
9 terms of maybe how could we increase the food stamp monies.

10 MS. WATKINS: Caller, you have raised the same
11 question that we've heard from a lot of people here today. And
12 that is an issue that has been raised at every conversation
13 that we've had around the country. So I'm sure that will be a
14 key issue discussed as we look at how we can make suggestions
15 for reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program. So your call is
16 very similar to the calls we've heard today from other people
17 concerned about seniors and the high cost of prescription
18 drugs.

19 MS. EMELDA MARTINEZ: Right.

20 MS. WATKINS: And it's also a concern for this
21 administration. So seniors are a high priority for us at USDA
22 as well as our friends over at the Agency on Aging. We are
23 meeting with them and have had some conversations around the
24 country looking at how we can address nutrition programs for
25 the elderly. This is a serious concern for us.

1 MS. EMELDA MARTINEZ: Right.

2 MS. WATKINS: So you have pushed the right button
3 today. It's a high priority for us, and we look forward to
4 sharing with you what some of our outcomes will be as we look
5 at reauthorization for the Food Stamp Program. So thank you so
6 much for calling. Now, is that Emelda Martinez?

7 MS. EMELDA MARTINEZ: Yes.

8 MS. WATKINS: Thank you so much for calling.

9 MS. EMELDA MARTINEZ: Okay. Sure thing.

10 MS. WATKINS: Bye-bye. Again, thank you so much.

11 MR. ROBERTO SALAZAR: Hello, how are you?

12 MS. JACKSON: I'm just fine. How about yourself?

13 MR. ROBERTO SALAZAR: I am terrific.

14 MS. JACKSON: Good. We really appreciate your
15 calling in today for our Food Stamp Conversation and your
16 comments. We're going to make sure that they get on the
17 record. So let's hear from you.

18 MR. ROBERTO SALAZAR: Thank you. I appreciate the
19 opportunity to give you my two-cents worth. But my thoughts
20 and comments center around the issue of payment accuracy of
21 outcomes versus output. Part of my concern, of course, from --
22 that's been my perspective that it is not step up to the plate,
23 so to speak, in terms of meeting the requirements, and much
24 less, the opportunity of payment accuracy. And part of that, I
25 think, stems from the failure to recognize that -- that if

1 there is any significant consequence outside of the usual
 2 consequences, administered penalties and lots of other official
 3 penalties. I think the fine needs to be raised in terms of the
 4 consequences. I think just as we go to the consideration of
 5 the welfare department, we talk about the client base needing
 6 to adopt a new culture of personal responsibility versus the
 7 entitlement attitude. Likewise, I think states not only
 8 recognize, but all states need to recognize that they too must
 9 change their -- that this is not complete entitlement, but it's
 10 rather a privilege to be able to administer this program. And
 11 too that I think the US Department of Agriculture needs to
 12 seriously entertain the motion that a significant consequence
 13 of failure to meet performance standards by any given provider
 14 could meet the risk of losing the -- that is to say the dealer
 15 could be seriously putting the program out for competitive
 16 bids. And I know that's a wild concept for some, but it's
 17 certainly a concept that values the discussion and merits of
 18 someone else's.

19 The second part of my comment and thought stems
 20 from the -- of outputs versus outcome. Although I think USDA
 21 has done a great job in terms of developing incentives for
 22 payment accuracy, still this enhanced funding formula, I
 23 believe that, in and of itself, places a tremendous amount of
 24 emphasis on assuring that, yes, the right people get the
 25 benefits, and it doesn't focus on the outcome of those

1 benefits. It doesn't focus on whether or not we're really
2 improving people's lives. That's not to say that I would take
3 away from the focus on payment accuracy by any means, but I
4 think we need to make it a two-sided approach and focus on
5 outcomes in addition to outputs of payment accuracy. And those
6 are my comments.

7 MS. JACKSON: Roberto, I think your comments are
8 timely, and some of those things we've heard earlier today.
9 But I sincerely appreciate your calling and offering those
10 things. We'll make sure that they're in our official record
11 and get to Washington. Any other things that you might happen
12 to think of and you think need to be considered as we go
13 through food stamp reauthorization, don't hesitate to drop us a
14 note and we'll make sure that those get in as well.

15 MR. ROBERTO SALAZAR: Thank you so much for the
16 opportunity. I appreciate it.

17 MS. JACKSON: Thanks for calling.

18 MR. ROBERTO SALAZAR: Bye-bye.

19 MS. SANDY DUNAWAY: Hello?

20 MS. JACKSON: Hello, Sandy, how are you?

21 MS. SANDY DUNAWAY: Just fine.

22 MS. JACKSON: We're glad you --

23 MS. SANDY DUNAWAY: I'm sorry?

24 MS. JACKSON: I was going to say we're glad you
25 called, and we'd like to record your comments for our official

1 record for our Food Stamp Conversation. So why don't you share
2 you comments with us.

3 MS. SANDY DUNAWAY: Okay. I went down to my local
4 food stamp office and just inquired about my qualifications. I
5 am a graduate student, and I have a ten-year-old child, and
6 because I am not on a government-funded program, like a
7 federally government-funded program, I did not qualify at all
8 for any sort of food stamp assistance. Now, in order to
9 qualify for federal work study you have to work twenty hours a
10 week and those hours can -- to get full benefits. But since
11 I'm working under an assistantship that's paid for through the
12 department at the university, it's still the same number of
13 hours a week, but all of this income, which is not very much by
14 the way, counts against me and I qualified for absolutely
15 nothing. And I think that this is an issue that needs to be
16 addressed. I don't think that the difference between for me to
17 better my education and being denied food stamps, especially
18 with a child, on the basis of having an assistantship that's
19 not only benefitting myself but benefitting the university
20 while I'm teaching is something that shouldn't be counted
21 against me.

22 MS. JACKSON: I very much appreciate your
23 comments. What we will do is take those comments and include
24 them in our record. And we sincerely appreciate your calling.

25 MS. SANDY DUNAWAY: Well, I appreciate your

1 listening.

2 MS. JACKSON: Thank you. Bye-bye.

3 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Yes, hi.

4 MS. JACKSON: Hello, this is Ruthie Jackson with
5 the Food Nutrition Service in Dallas.

6 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Hi, how do you do?

7 MS. JACKSON: Fine, how about you?

8 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Just fine.

9 MS. JACKSON: Good. We want to hear your comments
10 that we can include in our Food Stamp Conversation for
11 Reauthorization.

12 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Yeah, we've got a few
13 suggestions.

14 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

15 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Yeah. We're definitely in
16 favor of the Food Stamp Program. We think you're doing a great
17 job. We have a few suggestions that we'd like to see
18 simplified and possibly improved.

19 MS. JACKSON: Now, when you say simplified and
20 improved, do you have some specific suggestions for us?

21 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Yes, I do.

22 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

23 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: We would like to see the
24 exclusion of one vehicle per household. Simplification of the
25 standard utility allowance, possibly -- from any rules. I'd

1 like to see the possibility of a flat shelter allowance even.

2 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

3 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: I'd like to see a raised
4 minimum allotment for the elderly and disabled.

5 MS. JACKSON: Do you have a price range?

6 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Up to fifty dollars a month.

7 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

8 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: I'd like to see standardized
9 medical deductions for the elderly and disabled.

10 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

11 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: From a -- we'd like to see a
12 simplified self-employment calculation.

13 MS. JACKSON: Simplified self-employment
14 calculation.

15 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Right. For the deductions.

16 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

17 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: I'd like to see the E&T
18 program strengthened and the EBT requirement eliminated.

19 MS. JACKSON: All right.

20 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Corrective action point of
21 view. When we're making calculations on how much income to
22 count and where we have to differentiate between gross and net
23 incomes on means tested --

24 MS. JACKSON: Uh-huh.

25 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: -- income on client cost

1 errors. It's really difficult for that calculation there.

2 MS. JACKSON: Okay.

3 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Was there anything else? I
4 have others sitting here with me. I believe that's all we have
5 from New Mexico today.

6 MS. JACKSON: Well, we sincerely appreciate your
7 calling in. Those are really good comments. We've heard a lot
8 of things regarding the elderly deduction and some of the other
9 things that you've already mentioned. But we'll make sure that
10 they get put into our official record and appreciate your
11 taking the time to call.

12 MR. MICHAEL ROGERS: Okay. Thank you.

13 MS. JACKSON: Thank you.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The Food Stamp Program has
15 always -- I've always wondered why, if it's a federally-funded
16 program, how come there isn't federal employees that handle it?
17 Because, first of all, we start getting into this thing of food
18 stamps federal, Medicaid is state. And, you know, they're
19 trying to do the Medicaid now -- or at least our State is
20 talking about not having face-to-face interviews on that. You
21 know, I know that doesn't concern you, but I always was curious
22 why it wasn't federal employees. Okay. Looking at it from the
23 client's point of view, a lot of them -- not a lot of them -- I
24 use words -- there are clients who need food stamps and can't
25 get them because of the way the rules are written right now.

1 For instance, a person who's lost their
 2 job -- for whatever reason, they're not employed -- they were
 3 employed for a long time, they have bills to pay, but they have
 4 a vehicle that throws them out of the ballpark. Like me, if I
 5 was to suddenly lose my job for whatever reason -- we went
 6 private or whatever -- I have a '96 car. It's going to put me
 7 out of the Food Stamp Program. And I know food stamps aren't
 8 supposed to -- and I tell this to clients. They're not
 9 supposed to take the place of all your needs, but some of these
 10 families need help, and we can't do anything about it unless,
 11 are you sick? Are you ill? We can do the temporary -- and get
 12 a report from your doctor. I mean, say somebody lost their job
 13 because they were ill, I mean, we hop right on that and try to
 14 help them. We go out of our way to look for loopholes for
 15 everybody. But, I mean, when it's just blatant wealth that
 16 puts you out of business, what can we do? They've got to find
 17 another job and we do try to help them find another job, even a
 18 temporary one until they can find something that meets all
 19 their needs. In the meantime, they're going to do one of two
 20 things: They're going to spend all their money on food, or
 21 they're going to spend it on their rent. They've got to stay
 22 housed -- or their mortgage or whatever. Somewhere somebody's
 23 going to suffer. So that's always been a concern is the
 24 vehicle issue. You know, I think the Food Stamp Program looks
 25 at it like if you can afford a brand new car, how come you need

1 food stamps. And the client's looking at it like well, I need
2 help now. Anyway, the vehicle -- the resource issue is one
3 thing.

4 The elderly, like I was telling somebody on the
5 telephone -- the elderly is my passion right now because I see
6 so many of them that are suffering healthwise because of lack
7 of food or lack of medication because they have to make a
8 choice. Some of them, they call up and they say, Well, I'm
9 only getting ten dollars, what's that supposed to buy? Well, I
10 try to be very -- and my other workers -- try to be very
11 understanding and explain, well, it's the way the program is
12 written. It's the formula. We can't do anything about it. We
13 can't get the -- we try stress that they might have some
14 deductions that they haven't given to the worker -- medical
15 deductions, transportation -- anything that concerns medical is
16 a big one. A lot of workers either don't understand that
17 that's important or they don't even approach it with the
18 client, and I have a problem with that.

19 When I see a client or they call and say, I'm only
20 getting so many dollars, what's the deal, so I have to explore
21 -- transportation costs, you give me all this information and
22 then most of the time, we can help them a little more. But --
23 and then there's some workers that -- this is just a for
24 instance. A worker with -- like I said, I'm helping the
25 elderly. My mother is one of them, but she's -- I help her

1 with her food. But the thing is, people in her complex that
 2 are elderly on a fixed income. This one lady is eighty years
 3 old. She's on oxygen. She's in a wheelchair. She only gets,
 4 like, around eight hundred and something dollars -- around
 5 eight hundred a month in Social Security. That's all she has.
 6 She pays five hundred and ten dollars for rent plus her
 7 utilities and she's got medications to pay for. She's either
 8 got to give up the medications or the food. So I asked her
 9 about this and I said, you can qualify. I took her an
 10 application. She filled it out. I sent it in to the offices.
 11 A worker put a note on her door because she couldn't go into
 12 the office. This lady said, Well, I tried years ago to get
 13 food stamps and I was over income. And I think I might be over
 14 income. The worker did not explore that. She said, Would you
 15 please sign this piece of paper. This is what the lady told
 16 me, now, not the worker. She said would you please sign this
 17 piece of paper withdrawing the application? And it's because
 18 -- I'll be honest with you -- it's because the workers are
 19 overworked. We don't have enough workers, competent, qualified
 20 workers because the private industry's taking them away. And I
 21 wouldn't be in this job right now except I'm hoping to make a
 22 change. I'm not just sitting back complaining now. I'm going
 23 to take an active role as a legislator.

24 The employment retirement system, I mean, it's
 25 lacking and I'm just taking an active role and sitting back I'm

1 going to give it a few more years. If nothing happens, then I
2 gave my best shot and then I'm going to go teach. If things
3 don't change within our system here in Texas, as far as
4 benefits, I'm going to switch gears. I'm going to give it a
5 couple more years. I'm going to go into teaching then because
6 I can make twice as much money being a teacher as the job I'm
7 in now. So anyway, the -- I invited -- I filled out a piece of
8 paper this morning and left it in that other room way over
9 there. That's it. That's me.

10 If y'all want to come visit our office, please do.
11 See how busy we are. I mean, our workers are getting -- we
12 have mass interviews. Now, not just food stamps. This is all
13 the programs. But we have mass interviews for recertification
14 or maybe some new apps, you know, if they don't have room or
15 slots for individual appointments, but mass interviews, and
16 then they still don't get the individual attention. But some
17 of the workers are being scheduled in a morning mass, nine and
18 eleven clients, and you cannot see nine or eleven clients in
19 one four-hour period of time and do justice to their needs.
20 That's my opinion. It's another opinion, but that's what we're
21 forced to do because our staff is so low. We've lost forty
22 percent in our office within the last few months going to
23 better paying jobs out in the private sector -- five hundred
24 dollars more a month. A few of them were really lucky and got
25 like a thousand dollars more a month. You know, you can't beat

1 that. Because when you ask somebody to do a stressful job like
 2 ours is, being taking care of people that have needs, if your
 3 needs aren't taken care of, you can't help them. We have
 4 workers walk out of our office, you know, that were supposed to
 5 be interviewing. I was on vacation, so I was just -- this is
 6 just hearsay, but it did happen. We had four workers, or was
 7 it six, that walked out of our office because they found out
 8 how many people they had to interview, and they said, I can't
 9 handle that, and they went home. And it's not just my office.

10 I went to a meeting in Austin. I took -- to
 11 Austin for DHS and the Union and spoke with supervisors and
 12 other workers at my level from other regions and other offices,
 13 and they're encountering the same issues. And I've never seen
 14 it this bad. It's been bad off and on, but it's progressively
 15 getting worse and worse. And it's like the attitudes -- and
 16 you can try as hard as you can to spark everybody's attitude
 17 when they come in and make everything happy and, hey, let's
 18 do -- hey, isn't this a good Monday morning. What's good about
 19 Monday? It's the first day of the week. That's right, first
 20 day of the week and we have the rest of the week to look
 21 forward to the weekend. You know, you do things like that to
 22 get them enthused about having a job even. But when you have a
 23 few people that are leaving and they say hey, I'm getting a job
 24 doing this and this and this for this amount of money and not
 25 the stress. And almost everybody in our office -- they

1 actually could go out and find another job.

2 But getting back to the clients, they -- I've
3 encouraged -- this is the form, this meeting I went to
4 yesterday. This is what we -- what was passed out to us
5 attending our DHS meeting, and I encouraged everyone in our
6 office and anyone who can spread the word to call y'all today
7 or e-mail you. If not today, are these numbers good
8 permanently?

9 MS. JACKSON: The eight-hundred number's good just
10 for today, but you can still send us your e-mail or comments in
11 the mail, because we'll accept those all the way --

12 MS. NANCY GARCIA: August 31st.

13 MS. JACKSON: August 31st and possibly even
14 shortly thereafter.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Because I've been
16 encouraging clients, you know, the ones that I saw today. I'm
17 a Worker IV and I'm not a normal interviewer. I usually do
18 supervisory work, but we've been interviewing -- even the
19 supervisors have been interviewing because we're that short
20 staffed. Thank you. So I've encouraged the workers, and they
21 pass it through the other offices because, I mean, we just got
22 this yesterday and it was, like, I can't get this around to
23 everybody I know or fax it to them or e-mail everybody. I had
24 to do this today. And the clients -- I said, Tell your clients
25 about this. Have them -- I don't care if it's good, bad or

1 indifferent comments.

2 MS. JACKSON: Right.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We need some input from
4 everybody so that we can figure out what we need to do. So
5 some clients will probably call. Hopefully, they will. If
6 they haven't, hopefully, they will. They feel like the food
7 stamps is not enough, the amount granted. And when they make
8 those comments, you know, the only thing I can say is it wasn't
9 meant to be. We give a resource list of food banks, churches,
10 different places that can help them. Some of them don't want
11 to go that route because they don't like the food they get, but
12 when you're hungry you can make things work. I told them, If
13 you don't like some of the stuff they're going to give, tell
14 them you don't use that and they'll give you something else.
15 Because I went to food banks for my mom for a long time. And
16 for an elderly person, if you have special food needs, they try
17 to accommodate that. So there are resources and places out
18 there, but a lot of workers are overworked and stressed. They
19 don't explore; whereas, I have had to or wanted to for
20 different reasons. Did you have a lot of turnout from the
21 clients today?

22 MS. JACKSON: Not necessarily from clients,
23 primarily from --

24 MS. NANCY GARCIA: We did have lots of advocates.

25 MS. JACKSON: -- state agencies, charitable

1 organizations, nonprofit organizations.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. We have some really
3 good ones here in Dallas, and the ones that I know are really
4 good, you know, I let the clients know about those. They're
5 the ones that help the most. The clients that are working,
6 like I just had a lady come in my office today, and I gave her
7 your number, and I hope she calls. She is like fifty dollars
8 over the max gross that she can earn before she qualifies for
9 food stamps. And this woman, I feel, needs and deserves a
10 little help. I told her, I said, you know -- because she's
11 working a little bit of overtime here and there. You know, she
12 brought in her paycheck stub and I said, Okay, here's a form.
13 Have your employer fill this out, all the little details. Let
14 me look at it and see if the overtime that you're working is
15 not -- if we can exclude it for whatever reason. Maybe it will
16 put her back in the ballpark, because she has two little kids
17 -- well, she has a teenager which counts as two people he eats
18 so much. But she has two small kids and then a seventeen-year
19 old in the household, and herself, and she's working an average
20 job trying to support them. She came in today for some
21 Medicaid for the two youngest ones and that passed fine. She
22 can't get food stamps. So I said, you know, I'll hold up your
23 application. Get this filled out and we'll have a face to
24 face. I'll just see what I can do. I can't promise it, but I
25 said, I'll work real hard for you. There are, you know,

1 there's some people that they feel discouraged. You know, they
2 need that little bit of extra help. I don't know how much food
3 stamps she'll get, maybe not eighty dollars a month, but that's
4 eighty dollars.

5 MS. JACKSON: I think the thing that's important
6 is that for, between now and the end of the month, as many
7 individuals as you can to encourage to send their comments to
8 us or to e-mail us, write us, whatever. We need to hear that,
9 because even if it's repetitive, we need to know what the
10 issues and the concerns are. You hear the saying, there's
11 strength in numbers, and I think if you can get the message
12 across that these are the issues that are being faced in the
13 Food Stamp Program and these other things that the Congress
14 really needs to consider when we're talking about
15 reauthorization, it just goes that much further towards getting
16 the job done.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, I know in the last
18 meeting when I heard y'all speaking, I wanted to say things,
19 but I didn't. Other people probably brought it up about the
20 elderly -- fixed-income elderly that I believe you made the
21 comment or somebody made the comment that they had looked into
22 maybe a set amount for a fixed-income elderly person -- and I'm
23 going to throw a figure out -- instead of making -- putting it
24 -- go through all that interview and all, that they would have
25 a certain amount, like, say, fifty dollars. I mean, that would

1 help in the energy process, but whatever. But the -- I'm going
2 to be elderly. I am elderly. I'm over fifty now, but when I
3 get ready to retire when I'm seventy or seventy-five, I mean, I
4 may have some of these same issues. And the family has fallen
5 apart. I mean, family used to watch out for family. And the
6 way I see it now, speaking of a lot of these elderly is it's
7 every man for themselves. The kids are not taking care of the
8 parents. The parents raised them for eighteen, twenty years or
9 more and the kids are turning their backs on their parents
10 because they're self-centered. Not all of them, but there's a
11 lot of them. Like this eighty-year-old lady I was talking
12 about, she had a savings when she got ready to retire. Guess
13 who she gave it to? All her three kids. Do they help her or
14 call her, not a one of them. She hadn't heard from them in
15 three years, and she needs their help. So it's just irritating
16 that sometimes you feel like your hands are tied.

17 MS. JACKSON: Well, again I think -- I really
18 wanted to say thanks for taking the time to come in, even
19 though we have your comments from the phone. It's important
20 that we be able to hear that and just not wanting to say the
21 same thing over and over and over, but being able to hear it
22 over and over, sends the message home that there has to be some
23 changes made, that we need to consider some changes.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, hopefully our
25 legislative body when they meet again will consider some things

1 that will help our State give better service to the clients,
2 because I think when you rush through an interview, which the
3 workers do, even though it looks accurate, there may be
4 something that's missing that could be helping these clients
5 because they don't spend the time to explore everything to help
6 them whether they're elderly or working with a parent or
7 something like that, whatever. So anyway, am I in trouble?

8 MS. JACKSON: No. Thank you.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Do you want any of this
10 information? Do you need any of this stuff from my meeting --

11 MS. GARCIA: I don't -- I mean you --

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- of the Texas issues?

13 MS. GARCIA: You're welcome to leave anything that
14 you'd like for us to attach to the record as written comments.
15 We're certainly willing to take that. It's your call.

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Because even our Union is
17 very aware of -- and so are the legislators -- of the --
18 the -- what's impacting us.

19 MS. GARCIA: Uh-huh.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Maybe I didn't bring this.

21 MS. GARCIA: Certainly you can leave us things now
22 or you can send us things, whatever is comfortable for you.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, I'll just leave this
24 because I thought I brought an extra.

25 MS. JACKSON: Is it Roger --

1 MR. ROGER GETTY: Getty.

2 MS. JACKSON: Hi, I'm Ruthie Jackson. I'm pleased
3 to have you.

4 MR. ROGER GETTY: Thank you.

5 MS. JACKSON: And whatever comments that you'd
6 like to offer us on the Food Stamp Reauthorization Program,
7 we'd be delighted to hear from you.

8 MR. ROGER GETTY: Well, I brought this statement
9 in, and I'll just kind of paraphrase it a little bit. I want
10 to start by saying that I add my endorsement to the statement
11 that was provided by the anti-hunger advocates of the Southwest
12 Region joint recommendations that were provided. And I concur
13 with those recommendations. I've spent twenty-five years
14 representing low-income clients, working for legal aid/legal
15 services organizations on public benefits and health law
16 matters. So this experience has provided me with a lot of
17 insights on what does and what does not work in the Food Stamp
18 Program. However, today I want to particularly address the
19 issue of oververification of eligibility.

20 We're all familiar with overpayments,
21 overissuances of benefits. This has led to a fear of belief
22 that these incidents are rampant and that leads many governing
23 bodies to expend a lot of time and effort to verify and
24 reverify eligibility within the -- degree of certainty. This
25 in turn often leads to the denial of food stamps to many

1 eligible households who are simply unable to comply with
2 escalating verification demands. This problem occurs most
3 often when verifying earned income. Some workers, based upon
4 regional directives that are not found in the authorizing
5 handbook or regulations, claim that three consecutive pay stubs
6 must be produced. And if one is missing, the client must
7 obtain a wage statement from the employer. An applicant is
8 asked to verify an employment discharge with a response from an
9 often recalcitrant employer, especially if the circumstances of
10 the discharge were less than amicable. When none appears,
11 which is hardly a surprise most of the time, the application is
12 denied. Employers are not always diligent about sending wage
13 statements even for their current employees. Again, the end
14 result is often denial for, quote, unquote, failure to furnish
15 or provide information.

16 Eligibility workers and clients are often confused
17 about the nature of certain employment even. Is it contract
18 labor, self-employment or employment for another? For example,
19 I had a client who received a hundred and fifty dollars on an
20 irregular basis providing some caretaker services. He was paid
21 by the administrator of the estate who would issue a check for
22 payment of services. There were no taxes withheld, so on the
23 surface it appears like self-employment. This particular
24 person did not document any expenses associated with performing
25 those services, and the administrator did not timely provide

1 the information that was requested by the state agency. Again,
2 the result denial when the result could just have easily have
3 been that he was eligible based upon gross income of a hundred
4 and fifty dollars where he couldn't show what deductions he
5 might have been taking from that income for verifying even what
6 type of income it was.

7 There are different forms the agency in Texas uses
8 to document earnings from employment and earnings from
9 self-employment. And so sometimes when the question doesn't go
10 answered as to which it fits into, the absence of the form
11 itself leads to a denial of benefits. Indeed, these questions
12 about whether particular services are under the umbrella of
13 employment or self-employment is difficult to answer for even
14 many labor lawyers or IRS employees. Nevertheless, their
15 absence as again I said, leads to a denial of food stamps to
16 what appears to be an otherwise eligible household. When I and
17 other advocates become aware of these issues, we can often
18 intervene and corrective actions will follow either informally
19 or through a fair hearing decision. Yet, I have to wonder, how
20 many of those who should have received food stamps are denied
21 on these so-called procedural grounds.

22 Lewis V. Johnston was a case that I was involved
23 in here in Texas back in the mid-eighties and it was settled in
24 1987 to correct many of these processed problems. The agency
25 agreed to a judgment that called for, among other mandates,

1 elimination of denials for third-party noncooperation, internal
2 record searches to avoid duplicate verifications, worker
3 assistance without requests for mentally-challenged clients,
4 elimination of reliance on a single verification resource and
5 request and utilizing a list of possible verification sources
6 to clients at the time of certification interviews. Thirteen
7 years later, after this settlement, the same problems persist.
8 One reason that I've discovered off talking with employees and
9 department heads is that the quality control mandates that they
10 have to follow demand even more than what this lawsuit
11 requires. So they have to go -- they claim they have to go
12 beyond the requirements that were agreed to in this judgment.

13 To enhance accuracy on food stamp applications,
14 USDA should limit State expectation in oververification and be
15 careful and watchful of instances where benefits are denied to
16 persons who would otherwise be eligible but for these various
17 procedural grounds. Clients must be informed of all acceptable
18 sources of verification. Eligible clients should not suffer
19 procedural denials, but instead, if information to show
20 eligibility is available, they should be certified for the
21 allotment that corresponds to the best information available
22 within the time allowed for the certification decision. QC
23 standards must be changed to reflect reasonable verification
24 requirements.

25 I recognize that these solutions will not solve

1 all of the problems in administering the Food Stamp Program,
2 but they do address the maximum that eligible persons should
3 not go without for failure to produce the most reliable
4 information of verification when otherwise reasonable
5 verification of information is available and is provided. I
6 realize from my perspective mostly what I would see and say
7 about the Food Stamp Program is often rather critical because
8 obviously, if things are going well, people don't call upon
9 their local legal aid office. So I don't -- I'm not in a
10 position to comment about a lot of the successes of the program
11 except from what I hear from my colleagues in the anti-hunger
12 advocacy groups around the state and around the country. But I
13 do offer some of these reflections regarding this one area that
14 in particular I have seen a lot of problems in of late.

15 MS. JACKSON: Okay. We appreciate your comments.
16 Thank you very much for them.

17 MR. ROGER GETTY: Okay. You're welcome. You're
18 very welcome. Thank you for the opportunity.

19 (End of conversation at 6:00 p.m.)
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1 STATE OF TEXAS)

2 This is to certify that we, Kimberly Armour and
3 Trina D. Pollock, Certified Shorthand Reporters, reported in
4 shorthand the National Food Stamp Conversation 2000 at the time
5 and place set forth in the caption hereof, and that the above
6 and foregoing pages contain a full, true, and correct
7 transcript of said National Food Stamp Conversation 2000.

8

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